

“Then the voice from the cloud said,  
“This is my Son, my chosen; listen to him.” AMEN!

At the end of Epiphany season,  
we gather around the familiar  
Transfiguration story.

It happened on a mountain journey that  
three disciples took with Jesus.

The text is loaded with detail, wonder, and  
theological meaning.

A preacher is tempted to try to explain  
everything that happened and  
unpack the meanings behind the occurrences.

Stuff like... Moses and Elijah represent  
the law and the prophets and  
then with Jesus, he represents God’s grace;  
also allusions to the trinity are considered;

there’s the “out of his mind” remark  
from Peter about building three tents;

And the mountain top experience that  
no one could talk about after it happened  
until Jesus’ death and resurrection.

Today, I will try to not do that. :-)

Instead, let's to begin by taking a moment  
to get the bird's eye view of where we are  
in the church calendar year.

For this high point on the mountain must  
be looked at against the low points of  
the Lenten Season.

This high point of the three disciple's  
experience around a transfigured Jesus,  
and among the two pillars: Moses and Elijah,

with the presence of God and God's voice  
must be read with the reality of  
Ash Wednesday in mind.

Remember that you are dust (or ash) and  
to dust (or ash) you shall return.

Let us begin by setting our mind's eye on  
the mountain of the Transfiguration of Jesus,

to the coming valley of the Lenten Season  
and then upon Jesus on another mountain.

Well, maybe more of an elevated rock formation,

the one we call Calvary.

That is where Jesus will  
be on a cross all alone.

Looking at this text in this way gives us  
the chance to see how what happened  
on Transfiguration Mountain was  
marking the beginning of Jesus'  
journey to the cross.

Let us be invited therefore to think  
about this for a moment.

To think about what it means to glimpse God's glory.

And to consider how the past couple weeks,  
when we read how Jesus came down to people  
and spoke to them on level ground  
with plain language,

but now Jesus goes up with three disciples and  
we follow along in awe of what happened  
without trying to explain  
the theology behind it.

Because after it is all said and done,  
don't we want this glory moment  
to amaze and astound us?

Don't we want a God that defies human logic  
and definable action?

We don't need to be afraid to be dumbfounded,  
like Peter was, and speak without really  
knowing what we were saying.

We don't because this is what God is...  
both in the plain and the magnificent;  
in the simple and complex;  
in the death and in the life.

It's really no wonder that the three disciples  
didn't say anything about what they'd seen.

The experience probably singed their eyebrows,  
crumpled them to their knees, and  
rang in their ears.

They saw the glory of Jesus, Moses and Elijah  
and were terrified as God overshadowed them. (Pause)

It's an interesting human reaction when  
we pause to consider Transfiguration Day  
as a celebration for us, it is, but  
it was a terrifying event  
for Peter, John, and James!

How would we change our daily behavior,  
our gift giving, the ways we use of our time, and  
how might we change  
our willingness to take risks  
to be with people  
if we were a little more  
terrified of God?

This is the God of death and the God of life, after all,  
the God which we learn time and time  
again will not be in  
the presence of evil nor walk in the  
ways of the wicked.

Maybe our eyebrows need a bit of singeing,  
our knees buckled, and our ears rung  
by a God that calls us to stay awake and  
to be alert. (Pause)

So, if you are properly scared, like I am, and  
worried now about God's unconditional love  
be encouraged instead to pray.

That's a very good practice for us to do  
and Jesus modeled that behavior to us  
for good reason.

With and through prayer, is where we find  
that everything positive begins.

In the moment that Jesus was praying,  
that was when everything: his appearance,  
clothing, and face lit up.

Prayer like Jesus' leads to dazzling experiences,  
but that is not the end of it.

What comes next is a departure.

To use the Biblical term, what comes next  
is the exodus.

Prayer, dazzling experiences, and exodus events.

With the Lenten season around the corner  
we will be committing ourselves to deep prayer.

From the practice of prayer we will  
witness dazzling experiences.

They may not be immediate, most aren't,  
we might even be silent for some time.

But then a certain looking back upon the moment,  
we may see the dazzling answer or shining  
moment and reflect  
“yes, God was there.”

It is then that we venture out, come down off  
the mountain you might say and speak  
affirming words, bring gentle touches,  
and even heal people.

Do you believe that to be true?

That you can heal?

We know we can hurt people,  
but often question if we can heal them?

We can, through prayer...  
encounter dazzling experiences... and  
then go out to heal.

What will your exodus be?

One of hurting or one of healing?

With the question hanging in the air for us,  
I will leave you with a story  
from Pastor John Sumwalt.

He met with Mae's niece to discuss funeral plans  
for her aunt had just died.

“Aunt Mae was really old.  
All her relatives except me have died.  
All her friends, too.

So I want to have a small and private service,” she said.

Pastor John tried to convince her to make the service public so that an unknown friend or neighbor of Mae’s would have the opportunity to say “good-bye,” and celebrate Mae’s life.

But the niece was adamant.

“Aunt Mae wouldn’t want all the fuss and I am the only surviving relative.”

She went on to admit that she had not really seen Mae for a number of years, but insisted they were close when she was younger.

She spoke of how she’d spent summers with her aunt and uncle working in the little cafe they owned.

Pastor John wanted to say,  
“Then surely you must know of all the friends they would have had by working in the public like that?”

But he didn’t because he could tell



she had made up her mind.

So they planned the funeral and  
the only people present were the niece,  
the funeral director and Pastor John.

And he went through the ritual and talked  
about Mae's life, faith and witness as best  
he could but deep inside he was angry.

He felt like he'd failed Mae and he battled  
feelings of resentment for the niece's insensitivity.

When the funeral director's hired hands  
brought the casket to the church's cemetery  
Pastor John prayed:

These are your mourners, Mae,  
with the saints who had already passed...  
we commit you to God.

The next Sunday, Pastor John was surprised  
to see Mae's niece at church.

On top of that, he couldn't believe  
the number of new faces in the pews.

More than a few, the place was packed.

When he stepped into the pulpit, he considered  
that there must be a family reunion  
that no one mentioned.

After the prayers and during  
the sharing of the peace,  
a woman named Mabel came up  
to Pastor John and asked if it would  
be alright for her to say  
a little something about  
the life of Mae Banning?

She was trembling and Pastor John could tell  
it was going to be difficult for her, but  
the voice in his heart gave approval.

So she went to the lectern mic  
without any notes and said,

“Mae was my best friend.

We went to grammar school together and  
have been close ever since.

But that is not what I want to share.

I want to tell you about the way  
she loved to help people.

Most of you know she owned  
the Gothard Street Cafe with Ralph.

It was where the donut shop is now,  
right across from the fraternity and  
sorority houses.

College kids always came in and she and Ralph  
were like mom and dad away from home.

Many wouldn't have made it through college  
if it wasn't for them.

They gave work, lent money, and  
stayed open late for study groups.

Mae was the listening ear and watchful eye  
when a boy or girl came in with a broken heart,  
or other serious troubles sometimes.

An expulsion for poor grades,  
a pregnancy, or maybe even caught  
for cheating on an exam.

Mae would see the trouble and come out  
from behind the counter to offer counsel  
to whoever needed help.

She'd often get them connected to a pastor

or a school counselor and she gave out plenty of hugs and prayer.

Ralph would often say, “Mae’s face would shine just like sun when she was in her glory with her kids.

They loved her and they brought out the best in her.”

The woman paused for a moment and admitted that she could go on and on about Mae but this was enough.

Mae did departure well and I thought that it should be said.”

When Mabel sat down, another stranger stood up and said,

“I am one of those kids Mae helped.”

Then another stood and then another until half of the congregation stood up in honor of Mae’s life.

They were all Mae’s kids.

We closed the service with “We are Marching in the Light.”

And the roof was raised with song and voice.

I looked over at Mae's niece and was surprised  
to see her face shining.

Her face also reflected God's glory as  
she glowed while she sang."

AMEN!